

THE CORRESPONDENT.

Magna est Veritas et Prevalebit.

VOL. I.

NEW-YORK, FEBRUARY 10, 1827.

NO. 3

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor of the Correspondent.

Sir : I beg leave to hand you the MSS. of an original work, in which it is endeavored to trace Christianity to a source very different from that which is generally acknowledged among its votaries. The contents formed the subject of three lectures, delivered last summer, before the New-York Institute, and the author was induced to commit them to paper at the request of several of the members who were present at their delivery, and who are desirous of seeing them published in your independent paper.

PHILO.

THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY ; OR, TRUTH DRAWN FROM FABLES.

"The simple believeth every word ; but the prudent man looketh well to his going."—*Proverbs, ch. xiv.*

CHAP. 1.

Before we enter into an inquiry into the nature and character of the doctrines of Christianity, we shall endeavor to throw some light on the historical origin of a sect, which, humble and unperceived in its source, has invaded a great part of the globe, swept away the most ancient religions of former ages, and powerfully contributed to destroy the most precious remains of antiquity, and particularly the venerable monuments of Egyptian learning, which had resisted even the ferocious and stupid despotism of Cambyses. What so many ages had spared, what all the

sects of tolerant polytheism had contemplated with awful admiration and respect, was at once destroyed by the blind fanaticism of the most intolerant sect that ever led astray deluded man. This gigantic monster, after having given a final blow to the worship of ancient Egypt, and deprived succeeding ages, perhaps forever, of the invaluable intelligence of hieroglyphic writing, in which was consigned the knowledge acquired by the Egyptian priests during thousands of years, exerted its utmost and constant energies, to involve in obscurity the early history of the origin of Christianity, by suppressing such writings as might give an insight into the way in which the new sect arose out of old systems of religion.

Christianity, in its early formation and rise, having been confined to the lowest class of people in Judea, Syria, and Asia Minor, was not at first noticed by persons capable of inquiring into its merits ; and when it became an object of attention among men of learning, it was already wide spread ; the only writings that contained the traditional accounts of whatever related to its foundation and establishment, were in the exclusive possession of the Christian priests or elders ; and it is acknowledged by all the early church writers, that such books were withheld with the utmost care from the Gentiles, and were only read by the highest in dignity in each communi-

ty, generally composed of the most ignorant orders of society ; few among them being able to read and write. To such neophytes the elders read passages of their books, which they explained as they pleased, and commented on according to their notions and particular doctrines. They taught some prayers to their followers, enforced certain practices, such as baptism and the consecration of the bread and wine ; and this constituted the principal part of the worship as then performed. Each community had its own books or legends, to which most of the others were quite strangers.

From what takes place even in our enlightened times, we may easily conceive how difficult it must have been in the first ages of Christianity for an inquisitive mind, not subdued by a fanatical adherence to its dogmas, to get an insight of the sacred books. This sect was, in fact, during its early and gradual progress, that is for about two centuries, an association of secret and affiliated communities, who met in places remote from general observation, and where mysteries were performed, exactly after the manner and in imitation of the initiations celebrated of old in the temples of the heathen gods. To such ceremonies adepts alone were admitted ; and, as in the mysteries of Eleusis, such only as had received the full initiation were allowed to be present at, and to partake of, the grand mysteries, from which the neophytes and the profane were alike excluded. Unbounded credulity, obedience to the elders, and mutual fraternity among the brethren, together with the most absolute secrecy towards the profane, in whatever related to the mysteries, ceremonies, and dogmas of the society, composed the duties of every adept. Doubt, and of course inquiry being

entirely proscribed in matters of faith, to believe, without the slightest previous examination, was held as the most important duty and meritorious act. Thus was ignorance perpetuated among the primitive Christians, and the fabrication of legends and tales on which this religion is formed, became an easy task for the superstitious believers or crafty impostors, who became the leaders of the different sects of the new religion. As these were very numerous, separated by great distances, speaking different languages, and professing very different opinions, it is not surprising to find the books that have come down to us, so full of contradictions ; although it is unquestionable that our actual canonical books, forming what is called the New Testament, were only selected out of numberless other legends which we know to have existed in the first centuries, because they were compilations in which many chapters and passages were similar, and even copied verbatim ; while the contradictions, although numerous, manifest and important, were probably less glaring than in many of the rejected gospels. Be this as it may, certain it is that we have no positive date to pronounce on the authenticity of such writings, no means having been left to enable critics to ascertain the date of the real authors of any of them. All we know, and that from the confession of the fathers of the church, is, that more than 50 legends of Jesus, or gospels, existed in the second century, which were all considered as genuine and authentic, and held as such, and preferred by particular churches or congregations in the different countries where Christianity had sprung up. We know, likewise, that it was only three centuries after the supposed death of Jesus, that our actual four

gospels, and the other books of the New Testament, were selected from among numberless others, without any plausible reason being assigned for the admission of the former and the rejection of the latter. St. Justin accounts for it by miraculous agency, and by some cabalistical analogies. He says, that, as the cardinal winds or points are four, so there must be four gospels, neither more nor less.

It is, therefore, on the intrinsic evidence furnished by the selected books, and by a few of those rejected, which we possess either entire or mutilated, and which have escaped the actively destructive hand of early and later Christians during the first 12 centuries of our era, that we can exercise our criticism. The preservation of most of the rejected books we owe partly to the polemic discussions among the various sects of Christians, and partly to the difficulty of destroying completely so many works existing at a period when Christianity had become powerful enough to be publicly professed by men of eminence, high rank, and even by members of the imperial family. A great many fabrications continued to appear long after the wide diffusion of the Christian religion, and the learned Hardouin maintains that the Monks, about the 13th century, forged or altered most of the works of religious writers, and even many of the profane. We might adduce numberless proofs of this fact, and we firmly believe that among many others, the passage in Tacitus concerning the Christians has been interpolated, as well as the following one, which is transcribed in Suetonias, and probably inserted by the same hand. In both it is said that the Jews expected to become masters of the world. We insert both passages :

"Plusibus persuasum fuerat, antiquis sacerdotum litteris contineri, eo ipse tempore, fore ut valesceret orieus, *profecti Judæa rerum potirentur*, (Tacit. Hist. lib. v. cap. xiii.)

"Pererebueras ni oriente toto vetus ec constans opinio esse in fatis, ut *co tempore Judæa profecti rerum potircutur*." (Sueton Vesp.)

On perusing attentively the books of the New Testament, we perceive at first sight that they are mere compilations, taken partly from common sources, or collected from various materials by persons not acting in concert with one another. The contradictions in these books are numerous and important, and have been exposed by many able writers, ancient and modern. I shall only notice here such passages as tend to clear up the historical origin of Christianity. The apologists of this religion, not being able to deny, and much less to reconcile the many and glaring contradictions to be found in the gospels, have contended that such discordance proves, at least, the purity of the intentions of the writers, and acquits them of the charge of a concerted plan to deceive mankind. But, admitting the truth of this observation, surely no one will seriously contend that discrepancy on material historical points from cotemporary authors, can ever entitle a writer to be credited, and much less if the things related are supernatural and of themselves incredible, and, moreover, contradicted by other unquestionable evidence. Two or more false witnesses may disagree without a preconcerted plan, and still none of them will deserve more credit on that account. These apologists proceed upon a false data, taking it for granted that each of our gospels and other books of the New Testament are the work of particular individuals, who wrote them

exactly as they were found when adopted by the Nicene council.—Now, this is not only a gratuitous supposition, but is evidently contradicted, *prima faci*, by the intrinsic evidence afforded by such writings, which bear evident marks of having been compiled and altered by several hands. At this distance of time, and deprived, as we are, of the greater number of the first legends published by the framers of Christianity, and of the writings of its opponents, it is impossible to determine how far the remaining legends are the work of ignorance, of credulous and zealous fraud, or of imposture. We perceive clearly that the four gospels, as they stand now, are made up of extracts from written or oral tradition; many parables and sentences, and even whole chapters, being reproduced in each, and often almost verbatim. But what is most singular, and proves at once that these chapters and passages were inserted in each gospel by hands different from those to which they are ascribed, or who are the real authors of the remaining part which characterizes each of the gospels, is, that no one of the four evangelists quotes any one of the other three; which they would unquestionably have done, had they taken the transcribed passages from the others. Even Matthew, whose gospel is admitted to be the most ancient of the four, is never quoted by Mark, John, or Luke.—This proves, that, whoever was the author or compiler of each of our four gospels, the other three were either unknown to him, or were held in no estimation. Can it be supposed, that Luke, who wrote his gospel, with the avowed intention, as he positively says, of rectifying what preceding authors of the life of Jesus had incorrectly stated, and who pretends to be better informed

on the subject, would not have attempted to explain or to refute a number of things found in the other evangelists, and which he contradicts, either positively or implicitly, by the omission of such pretended facts! Is it credible, that Luke should have presented a genealogy of Jesus entirely at variance with that given by Matthew, without saying a word to justify himself? Could he have passed unnoticed the adoration of the wise men of the east, and the slaying of the children by Herod? The same reasoning applies to Mark and to John, and even more forcibly to the latter, who is supposed to have seen Jesus, and to have been an eye witness of his death, and could not omit the slaying of the children and the adoration of the magi, if true, nor fail to contradict such remarkable assertions, if false.

(To be continued.)

For the Correspondent.

THE TRINITY.

Mr. Editor: As all systems of religion have ever exhibited a compound of the grossest absurdity which superstition, ignorance, and folly could invent, so Christianity, when once it became the offspring of priestly ingenuity, ignorance, and interest, shared the same fate. Its features have exhibited the most palpable deformity, and have been as various as the variety of the species. The hypothesis of the Trinity, for instance, have been so multiplied, as to become almost innumerable; they are diametrically opposed to each other, and the whole preposterous and absurd in the extreme. One hypothesis maintains, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are all infinite, eternal, and self-existent; yet the Son is *begotten* of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from *both*, and that they subsist and exist

in each other. Another hypothesis, in the opposite extreme, asserts that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are only three names of the same being. Another asserts that these names are distinctions in the divine mind ; analagous to the will, the understanding, and power in the human mind. A fourth asserts that the Son and Holy Spirit are derived by generation, and procession from God the Father ; and that they inherit all the perfections and attributes, except that of self-existence ; that thus the Father is the grand fountain, the supreme head ; that he thus comprehends in himself all the perfections of the other two.

The doctrine of the Trinity, (to use a Trinitarian term,) *degrades* the divine character and attributes of the Deity. The Father, the first person in this Trinity of divine beings, is depicted in all the characters and colors of an earthly sovereign. He is agitated with all the variety of passions, which fills the human breast. He is described as a tyrant, whose sanguinary frown is worse than annihilation. The character of the second person, (the Son) on the contrary, is exhibited as directly opposed to that of the Father ; he is as a foil to the awful representation given of the Father. His chief characteristics are tenderness, pity, and mercy ; he regards the weaknesses of human kind with compassion ; he is ready, in order to shield them from the wrath of the Father, even to bear their punishment !—Hence the Deity is described as possessing two natures, the one as opposite to the other as day is to night. Thus the divine being is not only separated into parts, but the one part is directly opposite to the other in its nature and attributes.—Justice in God the father is wrath,

infinite and eternal ; justice in God the son is mercy and forgiveness ; Justice in God the Father is a vindictive principle of savage revenge, which pursues its fatal victims to everlasting perdition ; whilst the justice of God the son is willing not only to forego its demands, but to suffer infinite wrath, in order to rescue the objects of the Father's vengeance. Hence there must be two natures in the divine being, which are at constant variance with each other. Infinite wrath and infinite mercy must forever be opposed to each other ; there is no possibility of union between qualities as dissonant to each other as the greatest extremes in nature. Where day is, there cannot be night. Where the sun darts his fervid beams, the icy cold of winter must be banished.—Hence the father and the son cannot be united. Their minds are infinitely opposed to each other, in all their characteristics, and they must not only be separate, but must be at constant variance with each other. Infinite wrath must inevitably destroy its object of revenge ; and infinite wrath, without an equal power to oppose it, would destroy creation. If the Father is, or has been, infinitely wrathful, he must forever be so. If the Son is, or has been, infinitely merciful, he must be so immutably ; for it is impossible for God to change. Here there are two infinite and eternal beings, according to the trinitarian scheme, engaged in eternal contention with each other. Creation is the grand field of their action.—Man is the object about which they are contending. The one would plunge him into eternal misery ;—the other would confer upon him eternal happiness ; yet we are required to love each deity alike ; and to pay them equal adora-

tion. He who can perform this, must be something more or less than human.

The unity of the Deity once lost sight of, we are led into an endless maze of error and absurdity. The addition of a second Deity leads the way to a third, and hence to a fourth, and so on. This was peculiarly the case with the heathen world; and we find that the deifying of Jesus was the first step to all the monstrous absurdities of the Romish Church. It was not for a considerable period after Jesus was deified, that the distinct and separate personality of the holy spirit was taught; and, in subsequent times, the virgin Mary was as much an object of divine worship as the other three.*—Here then were four distinct and separate objects of Christian worship. Nor were these all. Saints and martyrs without number were considered in the light of tutelary deities; or at least as mediums, through whom prayer might be presented, or conveyed to God, and as intercessors to procure the divine favor. These notions were once considered as highly orthodox, and obtained as general sway as the present favorite, but equally fallacious principles of atonement, and salvation by faith alone, through the merits of Christ, &c. &c. all of which are opposed to the unity and infinite mercy of the great and glorious Creator.

WHITWORTH.

* It must be confessed, that the Catholic only acts consistently with his faith; for if Jesus be really and truly Almighty God, the Mother of God Almighty is as much an object of divine honors, as the Father of God Almighty. Witness the divine honors paid to Juno, the consort of Jupiter.

For the Correspondent.

PRAYER.

Mr. Editor: Among the many absurdities and contradictions appa-

rent in all the religions scattered over the face of the earth, that of addressing prayers or supplications to the Deity, is not the least ridiculous. If the Supreme were to hear all the addresses of all the belligerent powers, the civilized human race would long since have been extirpated. This thought is well expressed in the following prayer by William Law:—“ Oh blessed Jesus, dear redeeming Lamb of God, who came down from heaven to save men’s lives and not destroy them; go along, we humbly pray thee, with our bomb-vessels and our ships: suffer not our thundering cannon to roar in vain, but let thy tender band of love and mercy direct their balls to more heads and hearts of thy own redeemed creatures than the poor skill of man is able of itself to do.”

The nine enthusiasts, murderers of Sharpe, archbishop of St. Andrews, in 1579, bound themselves by an oath to sacrifice him to the suffering of their sect. They then betook themselves to prayer to ascertain “the Lord’s mind concerning it,” i. e. the murder: “and the word bore in upon them, *Go and prosper.*” On the 3d of May, they met him and cruelly butchered him. The murderers then all retired to separate prayer, and one of them, William David, “after prayer told them all that the Lord had said unto him, *Well done good and faithful servant.*” Nor is this the only instance in which fanaticism has pretended to have obtained, by supplication, the sanction of heaven for the commission of the most atrocious deeds. Ecclesiastical history is stained with so many enormities of this description, that their number almost exceeds credibility. Man, incapable of elevating himself to the Supreme being, is constantly endeavoring to bring him to a level with his own grovelling ideas and vicious propensities.—

Hence it is the enthusiast, fancying himself a favourite of heaven, never hesitates as to the nature of an act, and regards the shedding of blood as agreeable to the Deity, with whom he has the presumption to claim kindred, and to have a right to demand whatever may be suggested by his distorted imagination.—“ Weak mortal! (asks the virtuous Diderot) what need has the Deity of thy homage? Do thou think that thou canst add any thing to his happiness, or to his glory? Thou mayst honour thyself by raising thy thoughts to the Great author of thy being, but thou canst do nothing for him; he is too much above thy insignificance. Always bear in mind, that if any kind of worship be more acceptable to him than the rest, it must be that which proceeds from an honest heart. What matter then in what manner thou expressest thy sentiments? Does he not read them in thy mind? What matters it in what garments, in what attitude, in what language thou addressest him in prayer? Is he like those kings of the earth who reject the petition of their subjects, because they have been ignorant of, or disregarded some little formality? Pull not down the Almighty to thy own littleness, but believe that if one worship were more agreeable to him than another, he would have made it known to the whole world.”

Can we then reasonably suppose, that a being so wise, just, and intelligent, will derange his system, or change his plans for such weak beings as men? Can we rationally believe, that any prayers we can address to such a being will possess worthy and suitable requests, or that we can point out to him proper modes of action? Can we at all flatter ourselves, that to please us and gratify our discordant wishes, he will alter his immutable laws? Can we hope

that, to gratify our humors, he will arrest the eternal laws of nature? Will our loud cries, or most fervent supplications, prevent a country from being unhappy when devastated by an ambitious conqueror, or subjected to the capricious will of unfeeling tyrants, who bend it beneath the iron rod of their oppression?

In whatever manner the subject is contemplated, it is evident, that the prayers which men address to the divinity, always suppose their supplianting a being whose wisdom is defective. It is to suppose him capable of change, to bring his omniscience into question, to attack his omnipotence, and to arraign his goodness. It is, at once, to say, that he either is not willing, or not competent to judge what would be most expedient for man, for whose sole advantage and pleasure, they nevertheless insist, he created the universe.

CLIO.

For the Correspondent.

DEISM DEFENDED, NO. III.

Mr. Editor: The degree of evidence afforded by miracles and prophecies in favor of the Christian religion, is lastly to be considered.

Evidence of a more imposing and irresistible nature, is required in proportion to the remoteness of any event from the sphere of our experience. Every case of miracle is a contest of opposite impossibilities, whether it is more contrary to the experience that a miracle should be true, or that the story on which it is supported should be false; whether the immutable laws of this harmonious world should have undergone violation, or that some obscure Greeks and Jews should have conspired to fabricate a tale of wonder? The actual appearance of a departed spirit, would be a circumstance truly unusual and portentous; but the ac-

cumulated testimony of twelve old women, that a spirit had appeared, is neither unprecedented nor miraculous.

It seems less credible that the God, whose immensity is uncircumscribed by space, should have employed the disgraceful means attributed to him, to effect the salvation of man, than that some old knaves, or insane dupes, had deceived the credulous multitude. We have perpetual and mournful experience of the latter; the former is yet under dispute. History affords us numerous examples of the possibility of the one; philosophy has, in all ages, protested against the probability of the other. Every superstition can produce its dupes, its miracles, and its mysteries. Each is prepared to justify its peculiar tenets, by an equal assemblage of portents, prophecies, and martyrdoms.

Prophecies, however circumstantial, are liable to the same objection as direct miracles. It is more agreeable to experience, that the historical evidence of the prediction really having preceded the event pretended to be foretold, should be false, or that a lucky conjunction of occurrences should have justified the conjecture of the prophet, than that God should communicate to a man the discernment of future events. We defy the Christians to produce more than one instance of prophecy in the Bible, wherein the inspired writer speaks so as to be understood, wherein his prediction has not been so unintelligible and obscure, as to have been itself the subject of controversy. The one prediction which we except, is certainly most explicit and circumstantial. It is the only one of this nature which the Bible contains. Jesus himself here predicts his own arrival in the clouds, to consummate a period of supernatural de-

solation, before the generation which he addressed should pass away.—Eighteen hundred years have passed, and no such event is pretended to have happened. This single plain prophecy, thus conspicuously false, may serve as a criterion of those which are more vague and indirect, and which apply in a hundred senses to a hundred things. Either the pretended predictions in the Bible were intended to be understood, or they were not. If they were, why is there any dispute concerning them? If they were not, wherefore were they written at all? But the God of Christianity spoke to mankind “in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.”

The gospels contain internal evidence that they were not written by eye-witnesses of the events which they pretend to record. The gospel attributed to Matthew was plainly not framed until some time after the taking of Jerusalem; that is, at least forty years after the death of Jesus; for he makes the latter say, (c. xxiii. 35,) “that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the altar and the temple.” Now, according to Josephus, Zacharias, son of Barachias, was assassinated between the altar and the temple, by a faction of zealots, during the siege of Jerusalem.

Christians assert, that the design of the instances of supernatural interposition, which the gospels record, was to convince mankind that Jesus was truly the expected redeemer. But it is as impossible that any human sophistry should frustrate the manifestation of omnipotence, as that omniscience should fail to select the most efficient means of

accomplishing its design. Eighteen centuries have passed, and the tenth part of the human race have a blind and mechanical belief in that redeemer, without a complete reliance on the merits of whom their lot is fixed in eternal misery. Surely, if the Christian system be thus dreadfully important, its omnipotent author would have rendered it incapable of those abuses from which it has never been exempted, and to which it is subject in common with all human institutions. He would not have left it a matter of ceaseless cavil, or complete indifference to an immense majority of mankind. Surely, some more conspicuous evidences of its authenticity would have been afforded, than driving out devils, drowning pigs, curing blind men, animating a dead body, and turning water into wine. Some theatre, worthier of the transcendent event than Judea, would have been chosen; some historians better adapted, by their accomplishments and their genius, to record the incarnation of the immutable God. Humane individuals restore drowned persons; every empiric can cure all diseases; drowning pigs is no very difficult matter; and driving out devils was far from being either an original or an unusual occupation in Judea. Do not recite these stale absurdities as proofs of the divine origin of Christianity.

If the Almighty had spoken, would not the universe have been convinced? If he had judged the knowledge of his will to have been more important than any other science to mankind, would he not have rendered it more evident and more clear?

These are the general grounds of my disbelief of the Christian religion. I could collate its sacred writings with the Braminical record of the early ages of the world, and identify its institutions with the an-

cient worship of the sun. I might have entered into an elaborate comparison of the innumerable discordances which exist between the inspired historians of the same event. Enough, however, I presume has been said to vindicate Deists from the charge of groundless and infatuated scepticism. We trust, therefore, to the candor of Christians, for the consideration, and to their logic for the refutation of our arguments.

ARISTIDES.

The Correspondent.

Magna est Veritas et Prevalebit.

NEW-YORK, FEBRUARY 10, 1827.

Another Auto de fe.—It will be seen, by the subjoined paragraph from the *National Advocate* of the 7th inst. that the editor of that paper, following the example of the *Times*, has devoted the *Correspondent* “*to the flames!*” Having so recently remarked on this *very satisfactory* mode of refuting the principles contended for in our columns, it is unnecessary at present to say more on the subject. One remark, however, we may be permitted to make. The editor of the *Advocate* says, that “this is probably the *first* periodical work ever published in the United States, that publicly avows and defends deism.”—The principles of deism (i. e. the unity of the Deity) are avowed and defended in every Unitarian publication in the United States, and these publications, it is well known, are not few in number. The conductors of them also maintain, that deism is clearly taught in the Bible, and that the doctrine of the trinity was an invention of priesthood, upwards of 300 years after the period in which Jesus promulgated his doctrines.

Impiety and Deism.—We wish the *Magna Veritas* of the “Corres-

pondent" (a new weekly paper) would not trouble us with his pamphlet. It is a most horrible concern. *We mean to commit our copy to the flames*, and hope every well meaning man will do the same with theirs.—This is probably the first periodical work ever published in the United States, that publicly avows and defends deism. Away with such stuff."

To Correspondents.—We have received two communications of a very opposite nature: One of them, signed "Monitor," asserts that the "divinity" dwells in us "as an actuating, though unknown deity, a principle, whom thou ignorantly servest." The other, with the signature of "A true Believer," assures us, that "Satan is the principle, or being, that moves us to assail religion." We are certainly indebted to these two correspondents for considering us of sufficient importance to merit the attention of the Deity and of the devil at the same moment. We feel no indications, however, of being possessed by the latter; nor are we able to discover how Monitor could ascertain, that we are moved by the former, whom he pronounces to be "unknown," and in whose service we are "ignorantly" engaged. The fact is, our correspondents have mistaken the design of this publication. Monitor aims at establishing the *allegorical* sense of the old and new Testament; and "A True Believer" as strenuously contends for the *literal* sense; without either of them seeming to be aware, that it is absolutely necessary to obviate the objections existing against the *authenticity* of these books, before they can be permitted (in this journal at least,) to maintain their conflicting interpretations. It is distinctly stated in our prospectus, that "we recognize nothing to be true that is incapable of

proof, or demonstration," and that our "object is the diffusion of correct principles." To admit discussions, founded on writings, the truth of which is questionable, would lay us open to sectarian disputations of no utility, but every way calculated to retard the progress of useful knowledge, to sow discord among nations, and to increase the influence of that power which is formed on the maxim, that "ignorance is bliss," and that it is not merely foolish, but criminal "to be wise."

A furious letter, signed "No Infidel," accusing Paine of being "a notorious drunkard," "a besotted wretch," is only worthy, from its virulence, to have a place in the *Times*, or other fanatical paper.

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS.

Fanaticism continues to wage open war in Europe against liberal principles. By the last accounts from Portugal, it appears that the *Apostolics* had burned the town of Braganza, and put every one to death endowed with liberal and exalted feelings. Taking advantage of the ignorance of the Portuguese, the priests were strenuously occupied in prejudicing them against the Constitution, which they denominate "damnable and heretical; and that, coming from the hands of heretics, it would work the destruction of all who obey it." The bigoted and besotted Bourbons were loud in their *professions* of disapprobation, as to the barbarous and fanatical measures pursued by the priesthood. Little credit, however, was given by intelligent men to these protestations. The power of the Apostolic Junta, great as it had been, was put down in Spain, and by Spaniards only, until French armies, at the earnest request of Ferdinand, restored it. Since that period, this junta has

constantly been engaged in crushing every principle of thought and action in Spain, which was not in conformity with passive submission to the despotism of the monarch, and to ecclesiastical tyranny. To establish this twofold power, in opposition to all rational freedom, all independence of mind, all intelligence, all virtue, is the unceasing endeavor of the French and Spanish priesthood. There can, indeed, be no security for the rights of nations, as long as this busy, intriguing, grasping, and ambitious order continues to exercise a political influence, instead of teaching the duties of morality. All incendiaries whether in public or private life, are detestable; but religious incendiaries are the worst of all.

The *Courier Francais*, a paper which generally maintains the rights of the people, states, that France and Great Britain had determined "to sacrifice that powerful interest, the supremacy of the priests and monks; the apostolicals of France Spain and Portugal may do what they will: —their reign in the peninsula is at an end. They may have the consolation of stirring up some troubles, and shedding a little blood; but they will soon cease to rule there; the despotism of Ferdinand will vanish before the first breath of England." Whatever may have been the political motives that induced the ministers of these two powers to unite in checking the proceedings of the apostolicals, it is evident that the increase of liberal principles, has had a great influence in producing this pleasing result. Although the court of France had patronized the monks, and had conferred offices of trust on many jesuits, we are well assured that the people hold these men in abhorrence, and embrace every opportunity of showing their devotion to liberal principles. The "right di-

vine" of monarchs has been stript of its charms; and the human mind seems prepared, in Europe, to burst the fetters by which priestcraft has so long held mankind in slavery.

PAINÉ'S BIRTH DAY.

(Concluded from our last.)

Mr. Slater said, that in attending a meeting to offer a tribute to the memory of Thomas Paine, he felt, in common with all present, the greatest satisfaction. Mr. Paine, who for his eminent talents, real sincerity, and pure disinterestedness as a political writer, was a man not surpassed by any the world had seen. In this point of view his character is unassailable; but as his stupendous mind naturally led him into a more general view of the abuses and impositions to which a great part of mankind are subject, he was naturally led to touch religious topics. And here it is that the corrupt, calculating on the prevailing superstition and credulity, have attempted to blacken his character. His calumniators all profess themselves Christians, though they have no more regard for the Christian religion than the emperor of China, or the grand signior; for, it is well known, that some of the most notorious villains that ever disgraced society, have been the most violent in their abuse of Thomas Paine. But then those men tell the world they are Christians. Most assuredly they are no more assimilated with that good man, the founder of their system, than candor and disinterestedness, which were both distinguished characteristics in Paine, can unite with bigotry and selfishness, both leading traits in the character of most of his opponents.

Let us examine the charge brought against Thomas Paine. It is a charge of *Infidelity*. The word infidelity, as

Mr. Paine said of the word blasphemy, is a word of dubious meaning. If I were in Rome, (continued Mr. S.) and believed in the mission of Mahomet, I would be termed an infidel. If, on the other hand, I were in Constantinople and believed in the divinity of Jesus, I would be called an infidel dog. So that we find there shall be two persons, one believing in the divine mission of Jesus, and the other believing in the divine mission of Mahomet; yet shall each and both of them be stigmatised as infidels, merely from the circumstance of their happening to be in different countries. Now, as it is clear the word infidel has different meanings in different places, it would certainly be more manly if those pious persons, when they take it upon themselves to call Thomas Paine an infidel, would inform the world what they understand by that term. If they mean by it a disbelief of the divinity of Jesus, in that sense Thomas Paine certainly was an infidel; for he has told the world so himself. What, then, is the consequence that follows this charge? Why it is this: that two-thirds, probably three-fourths, of the whole human race are of the same opinion; for, not only the entire people of Asia, by far the most numerous on the globe, with the whole of Africa, and a great part of this American continent, but even among those nations termed Christian, there are multitudes who are no more Christian than Thomas Paine was, or, likely, many of the respectable persons whom I now address. This I am well assured of, that if, in the course of this week, every man that disbelieves in the Christian scheme were to retire from New-York, those who continued behind would have no difficulty in obtaining houses next May on their own terms.

After the toast respecting the press had been given, the Secretary delivered the following address:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen: The toast which has just been drank, expressive of our ardent devotion to the liberty of the press, is a sentiment that revives in the bosom recollections of the most important and gratifying nature. "There is nothing (observes Mr. Paine,) which obtains so general an influence over the manners and morals of a people, as the press; from that, as from a fountain, the streams of vice or virtue are poured forth over a country: and of all publications, none are more calculated to improve or infect them, than a periodical one."

When the art of printing was invented, mankind were absorbed in the grossest ignorance. The clergy, who, before this era, held exclusive possession of all the learning in Europe, were themselves extremely illiterate; so much so, indeed, that the accounts transmitted to us by the writers of those times, seem scarcely credible. Many of the priests, it is said, "were unable to read their own Breviary, though it comprised nearly the whole cyclopaedia of their knowledge. The faculty of theology at Paris declared before the assembled parliament, that religion was undone, if the study of Hebrew or Greek were permitted. But a still finer specimen of controversial accuracy and literary skill, is afforded us in the account of a monk, who gravely assured his auditory, that the reformers had invented a new language, called Greek, against which it was necessary for them to be on their guard, it being the mother of all heresy; that a book was written in that language called the New Testament, a book full of daggers and poison; and that as to Hebrew, it

was certain that all who learnt it immediately became Jews!"

The establishment of several printing presses in Europe, in which the ignorance, arrogance, and presumption of the clergy were exposed, roused their indignation against the discovery, which they attributed to the devil, and alledged that "books were written with the blood of the victims who devoted themselves to hell, for the profit or fame of instructing others." Finding, notwithstanding these denunciations, that the art was rapidly advancing, the priests wisely concluded that, as they could not put it down by their invidious and malignant objections, it would be prudent to endeavour to turn it to their own advantage. They calculated that this valuable discovery, which they had at first regarded with so much terror, might be converted into an engine, to perpetuate the reign of craft and superstition. Accordingly, in a few centuries after its rise, we find printing encouraged by churchmen, and sovereigns induced, through their influence, to become the patrons of learning. But this unnatural alliance, so far from proving beneficial to the subjects of princes, served only to enable the priesthood to monopolize the fields of science and of literature, and to obtain the charge of education, by which they perverted the minds of youth, and increased their own fame and influence.

During the existence of this monstrous power, individuals were not wanting who endeavoured to unveil deception and hypocrisy. But such was the predominance of the clergy, that the human mind was involved in centuries of midnight darkness before any effectual inroad could be made on their spiritual authority; and even when philosophy, "like beaten gold spread over the world,"

its benign influence was every where checked, and innumerable valuable works, the labors of the real benefactors of the human race, were almost totally suppressed by the prosecution of their authors, or by the proscription of the books themselves. A few copies of some of them were fortunately preserved in the libraries of the learned, but the greater number were piously consigned to the flames by the votaries of superstition. Of late years attempts have been made, particularly in England, to revive these writings, the circulation of which, however, has been very limited, owing to the business having been undertaken by individuals. Besides, the few liberal works which have been recently published, are not the most valuable of those which have been preserved. What remain, form a depository of transcendent reasoning, and high authority as to facts, which all the lucid arguments of the priesthood, even when aided by the civil power, have never been able to invalidate.

It is a subject of congratulation that, whatever may be the sentiments of the other European governments, the ministers of the king of England seem, at last, to be aware of the folly of attempting to restrain free discussion on religious topics. Philosophers, as most of them are known to be, they could not always shut their eyes against the immense ray of light which the press, during the last century, has diffused over Europe; and however much they may have considered it good policy to protect the temporalities of the clergy as recognized by the constitution, they were at no loss to perceive the necessity of restraining the intemperate zeal of ecclesiastics. In the recent liberation of the persecuted Carlisle, after enduring for six years a rigorous impi-

sonment, and suffering all the privations which priestly cruelty could invent, we have a memorable instance of the triumph of liberal principles when contrasted with that ferocity, which, only a few years ago, would have consigned to a dungeon, perhaps for life, the intrepid and virtuous author of "Common Sense," because he dared to avow his belief in the unity of the Deity, and to hold up to contempt a system derogatory of the character of Divine Majesty, destructive of all moral obligation, and inimical to human happiness.

But while congratulating you on these triumphs of the press over the enemies of free inquiry in another country, it is a deplorable fact, that in the United States, we look in vain for a solitary instance, where this important invention is employed in enlightening our citizens as to their true interests. Swayed by mercenary motives,—too timid to risk any thing in defence of correct principles, or entertaining a mistaken reverence for acknowledged prejudices, the conductors of our journals attach more value to popular opinion, and are more anxious to court the smiles of men in office, than to merit the reputation of fearless and inflexible champions of the truth. In this paralyzed state of the press, the public are perpetually kept in ignorance of what constitutes their happiness. They hear but one side, and that is conceded only when it is entirely agreeable to the views of those who arrogate the right of controlling public opinion. Should an editor at any time venture to utter a rational sentiment, or admit a liberal communication, or even an extract, into his columns, he is quickly warned of his danger in the threatened, or actual loss of some narrow-minded subscriber, or of one who holds all

sacrifices to be impolitic, except those that are offered on the altar of Mammon.

Meanwhile, the priesthood, relying on the protection which they derive from this abject and servile condition of the public press, content themselves with declaiming from their pulpits, and, by secret influence, labouring to destroy all who have the courage to announce truth and expose hypocrisy. Formerly the clergy pretended to point their battery at *Satan*, who, by the bye, is the prop of their system; for without this personage it would lack of its leading and most important feature. Latterly, however, they changed their ground; left the "Old Serpent" at liberty to devour whom he pleased, and directed their whole attention towards the *infidel*, and against deistical writings. To aid them in putting these down, they have inundated the country with pamphlets of the most pernicious tendency, and with swarms of useless beings, who assuming the character of Missionaries, are unceasingly labouring to banish good sense from the earth, and to re-establish the empire of bigotry and of superstition. In this very city, they have from ten to twelve presses worked by steam, which are constantly employed on these pestiferous writings; and it is stated in official documents published in London, that the Religious Tract Society in that city, issued during the year 1825, no less than *ten millions five hundred thousand* pamphlets. The publications since the establishment of the society, are estimated to exceed *one hundred millions*. Since 1818, tracts have been printed in forty-two languages; and the receipts during 1825 in England and in America, amounted to the enormous sum of *one million six hundred thousand dollars!*

Is it possible to reflect on this monstrous expenditure, without deeply regretting the purposes to which it was applied, or without wishing it were in our power to prevent it. Hitherto, perhaps, the means of effecting this were beyond our control. The friends of liberal principles, through the machinations of their enemies, have been long unknown to each other; and without concert it is impossible to act with effect. But, by *union* every thing may be accomplished. Standing *alone*, it is scarcely possible for any individual, however fearless he may be, and however great his talents, to counteract the secret influence of the priests, who are unceasing in their efforts to banish from society, or utterly to ruin, every man who ventures to disquiet them. Certain of the aid of those whom they have made their dupes, they never attempt to refute by fair argument the objections opposed to their system. They have only to raise the hue and cry of *atheist* and *infidel*, when the diabolical spirit which dictates these epithets, is caught with avidity by their stupid adherents, who are not slow in giving proofs of its effects on their imbecile minds, by inflicting injuries of the most grievous nature on all who question the correctness of their creeds. But associated as a band of brothers, determined to aid each other in destroying this monstrous power, I am persuaded that not many years would elapse ere Reason, Science, and Philosophy would obtain the ascendant.

Let us, then, no longer procrastinate a measure so admirably calculated to obtain an object of such vast magnitude and importance.—Thousands; nay, I may say, millions in the United States, who are equally desirous with us of accomplishing this, wait only for a rallying point

to declare themselves. Be it ours to set the example; let a committee be appointed to draw up the plan of an Association, by which the object may be attained in the speediest and most effectual manner. The rapid increase of *knowledge*, which a great philosopher has happily and correctly designated *power*; our own standing in society; our posterity—all these demand this effort to rescue the human race from the spiritual thraldom under which they now groan, and to restore to man the enjoyment of those rights conferred by nature as an unalienable inheritance.

The dinner on this occasion was excellent. The greatest harmony and conviviality prevailed. Several appropriate Songs were sung; and the company retired at an early hour, evidently much gratified with the proceedings, and deeply impressed with the importance of continuing the celebration of this anniversary.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Prejudices.—Prejudice is common in a greater or less degree to all men. When a prince dies at Japan, there are generally fifteen or twenty of his subjects, who, in their zeal and affection, rip open their bellies and expire with him. Those who make the largest and deepest incisions acquire the greatest glory. An officer of the Emperor of Japan, as he was mounting the imperial staircase, met with another who was descending it. Their swords struck against each other; the latter was offended by it, and making an angry remark to the former, who excused himself by attributing the circumstance to accident,—adding that the two swords had rubbed against each other, and that one was quite as good as the other. “You shall see,” replied the aggressor, “the difference which

there is between two swords." He immediately drew his, and plunged it into his belly. The other, who was ambitious of a like honour, hastened up the staircase, to serve at the table of the emperor a dish which he had in his hands, and returned to his rival, who was expiring from the wound he had inflicted upon himself. He asked him if he still breathed, and immediately drawing his own sword, he followed the example of the dying man. " You should not have anticipated me," said he to him, " if you had not found me occupied in the service of the emperor ; but I die happy, since I have had an opportunity of convincing you that my sword is as good as yours."

Persevering Recluse.—Agnes du Rocheir, a very pretty girl, the only child of a rich tradesman in Paris, had like many others of her communion, a wish to get to heaven without once going out of her chamber ; and accordingly, on October 5, 1403, she built herself a little chamber, joining to the wall of a church, wherein was nothing but a little window, whence the pious (but filthy) solitary heard the offices of the church, and received the necessities of life. The church celebrated this seclusion with great pomp, for Agnes was rich. She lived this holy life till she reached her 98th year and then died.

Omens.—The Owl is regarded as a bird of evil omen, and is considered amongst the vulgar as the harbinger of death. An Arab philosopher walking onee in the country with one of his disciples, heard a detestable voice singing an air which was still more detestable. " Superstitious people," said he, " pretend that the note of the owl announces the death of a man ; if it be true, the song of this man might be supposed to predict the death of an owl."

PROSPECTUS.

The object contemplated by this Journal, is the diffusion of correct principles, which alone form the basis of morals and of happiness.

Notwithstanding the vast number of publications that are daily issuing from the press, there is still wanting a paper which will fearlessly advocate the paramount importance of the laws of *Nature*, and the dignity of *Reason*. It is by departing from these that good sense has been nearly banished from the earth ; that mankind are in darkness as to their true interests ; and that all the miseries which afflict society have originated

The pages of the *Correspondent* will be devoted chiefly to communications, and to miscellaneous articles, calculated to enlarge the mind, and bring man back to the path from which he has deviated. Although we recognize nothing to be true that is incapable of proof, or demonstration, the erroneous opinions entertained by individuals, can form no apology for the neglect or the violation of the rules of courtesy. No illiberal discussions or personalities, will be permitted : it shall be our constant aim to establish a character for temperate and sober reasoning, for operation, and for universal conciliation.

The *Correspondent* is published weekly, at \$3 per annum, payable in advance. No departure from this condition can be admitted as to *Country Subscribers*—Communications (post paid) to be addressed to the Editor.

* * * Arrangements have now been made by which the *CORRESPONDENT* will appear regularly every Saturday. Those who have signified their intention to patronize this work, are respectfully reminded of the terms of subscription. They cannot but be aware, that considerable outlays are requisite to effect its establishment, and that unless a desire to see this done is accompanied by pecuniary aid, they may, possibly, be disappointed in their wishes. From those city subscribers who may not feel it convenient to pay for a whole year in advance, the half of that sum will be accepted.

The *CORRESPONDENT* will be published in future at 48 Pine-street, opposite Niblo's Coffee House ; and subscriptions continue to be received at 114 Fulton-street ; at the book store corner of Vesey-street and Broadway ; at the book store corner of Reed and Greenwich-streets ; and at the Bank Lodge, 45 William-street, near Wall-street.